

“Reversing the Loss” - Progress Report 2001-2002

Goal A: Strengthen relationships with wetland Owners, nonprofits, local governments

Performance Measures Accomplished - Public Outreach

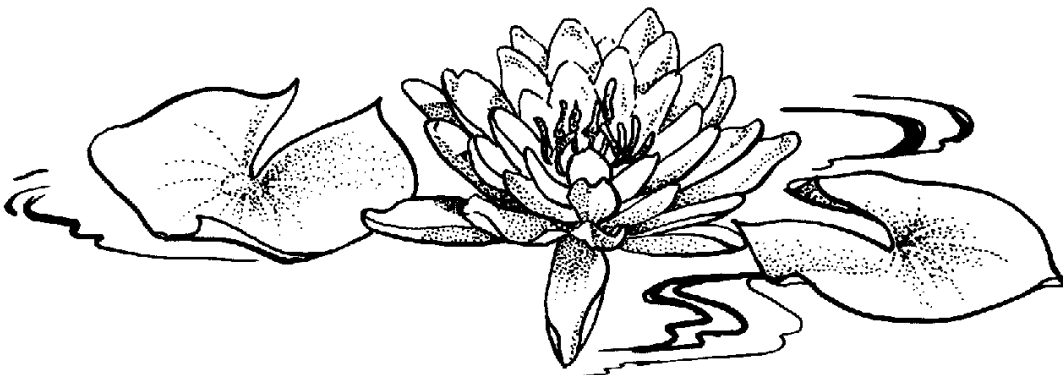
- ❑ DNR's six-year wetland strategy, *Reversing the Loss: A Strategy for Protecting and Restoring Wetlands in Wisconsin*, was published and widely distributed in 2001. The strategy forms the basis for wetland work planning and budgeting in the department.
- ❑ DNR developed a wetland Website with general information on wetland news, the Strategy, wetland functional values, wetland protection, wetland permits, inventory, restoration and management, publications and important links.
- ❑ The *Wetland Restoration Handbook for Wisconsin Landowners*, has been quite popular and has been used in hands-on workshops private property owners interested in restoring their wetlands.

Our Vision: We promote, protect, restore, enhance and preserve the quantity, quality and diversity of Wisconsin's wetlands as a critical component of ecosystems essential to the health and quality of life of our state's diverse citizenry, plants, animals and landscapes.

Goal B: Manage wetlands to protect diversity of species, wildlife health, and ecological integrity.

Performance Measures Accomplished - Restoration and Acquisition

- ❑ DNR's major restoration efforts are through the Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture. In 2000 (the latest report) 2,486 acres were protected by purchase or easement, 2,030 acres restored and 230 acres enhanced.
- ❑ The Wetland Reserve Program, administered by the US Natural Resources Conservation Service funds wetland restoration efforts. In the years 2000 through 2001, it has restored 2,990.9 acres of wetlands in Wisconsin.



- ❑ DNR established a Land Legacy Team to identify priority acquisition areas for the next 50 years. Wetlands are a key component of that acquisition effort.

Goal C: Streamline our regulatory approach for permits and restoration activities in wetlands.

Performance Measures Accomplished - Regulation

- ❑ On May 7, 2001, Wisconsin became the first state to restore protection to small, isolated wetlands left in limbo as a result of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in SWANCC v. Corps of Engineers. 2001 Wisconsin Act 6 restored protection to at least 1 million acres of wetlands stripped of federal protection by the court ruling. 2001 Wisconsin Act 6 requires that people must still receive state water quality certification to pursue activities in a wetland no longer under federal jurisdiction. The following rules are being developed to interpret and implement the provisions of Act 6:
 - Chapter NR 300, *Fees & Time Limits for Waterway & Wetland Permit Decisions*
 - Chapter NR 351, *Exemptions for Non-Federal Wetlands*
 - Chapter NR 352, *Delineation of Non-Federal Wetlands*
- ❑ 2001 Wisconsin Act 6 arrived just in the nick of time. In the four months from the court's decision to the passage of Act 6, the Corps notified 40 applicants the agency had no jurisdiction for the 244 acres of wetlands affected by their projects. Had the applicants proceeded in dredging or excavating all 244 acres, the loss would exceed in that short time period the average permitted wetland acreage lost during an entire year and across all kinds of wetlands, not just isolated wetlands. However, only a handful of applicants had filled or excavated the wetlands by May 9 and the unregulated loss was held to less than 100 acres.
- ❑ In 2001, 338 individual wetland water quality certifications were processed. The water regulation program received 4,493 applications, issuing 94%. A total of 409 enforcement actions were taken for wetland and waters violations.
- ❑ The Saint Paul District of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers reported a total of 2,142 permit actions under the statewide GP/LOP for just over 101 acres of wetlands. The total for all permit actions in Wisconsin was 2,819 actions authorizing 352 acres of wetland filling.
- ❑ Wisconsin adopted administrative rules that could in some cases permit landowners to pursue projects that fill in low quality wetlands if part of their project also included restoring other wetlands nearby. The rule, Chapter NR 350, *Wetland Compensatory Mitigation*, implements 2000 legislation authorizing a compensatory mitigation program; the program began Feb. 1, 2002. Chapter NR 103, *Wetland Water Quality Standards*, was also revised to include consideration of compensatory mitigation in regulatory decisions. These revisions became effective Feb. 1, 2002.
- ❑ The 2001-2003 state budget authorized 2.5 positions to begin implementing the wetland compensatory mitigation program. None of these positions has been filled. However, a 2001 U.S. EPA grant funded a half-time position to assist with wetland compensatory mitigation training.
- ❑ Seeking to assure that wetlands proposed as part of a compensatory mitigation plan are correctly and successfully restored, DNR prepared and published, in conjunction with the U. S. Army Corps St. Paul District, EPA-Region 5 and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a technical guide for use by applicants, consultants, and agency staff and in training. All agencies are agreeing to use the standards and criteria in NR 350 and the *Guidelines* when reviewing and approving compensatory mitigation in Wisconsin.

- ❑ A new administrative code, Chapter NR 353, is being developed to create a general permit for specific activities used in wetland conservation projects. The rule creates a streamlined process to authorize wetland restoration and maintenance by private landowners.
- ❑ A Memorandum of Agreement between WDNR, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service was signed on September 11, 2001. The MOA creates a process for streamlining the regulatory approval process for federally funded wetland restoration and enhancement activities.

Goal D: Develop and use modern technology to map, monitor, protect and manage wetlands.

Performance Measures Accomplished - Monitoring and Assessment

- ❑ DNR staff completed a strategy to be used as the implementation plan for future wetland monitoring efforts.
- ❑ DNR was successful in creating a permanent wetland monitoring position to be filled in 2002.
- ❑ The University of Wisconsin Environmental Remote Sensing Center, in cooperation with DNR's Wetland Inventory program, investigated new technologies to facilitate wetland map production. While none of the new technologies offered any advantage to the current method of delineating wetlands through stereoscopic air photo interpretation, digital orthophotography will be utilized as the base map for compiling new wetland maps. The study report will be published in 2002.
- ❑ DNR staff are developing a floristic quality assessment methodology for Wisconsin that will measure plant community integrity in wetlands as well as in terrestrial communities. A computer program is being developed for using this methodology.
- ❑ DNR staff are investigating mapping reed canary grass for use as a general indicator of wetland quality. The project involves developing a method to map occurrence of the most extensive invasive species in Wisconsin wetlands -- reed canary grass -- and correlate the extent of its occurrence with land cover and indicators of hydrologic disturbance, primarily wetland drainage features.
- ❑ DNR staff are starting a project in the Milwaukee River Basin to assess how the loss of wetlands in that basin has affected the plant communities, wildlife and water resources, and to provide managers and planners with information to guide where to restore wetlands to provide the most benefit. The models will generate assessments (or predictors) of wetland function in the six watersheds that comprise the basin.

- ❑ A survey protocol has been developed and baseline monitoring has been conducted at *Galerucella* beetle release sites to monitor the effectiveness of the beetles in reducing purple loosestrife populations and documenting the response of native vegetation. The biennial state budget for FY 02-03 includes a position for a statewide coordinator for the growing Purple Loosestrife Biocontrol Network. This person will coordinate distributing education and technical assistance in all aspects of the biocontrol project to teachers, organizations and interested citizens. This will include both volunteer driven surveys to identify existing purple loosestrife infestations and monitoring the response of vegetation at beetle release sites.
- ❑ Contingent on grant funding, plans are underway to join with the Wisconsin Wetlands Association to offer workshops for volunteers to conduct surveys and workshops to train volunteers to rear and release beetles and monitor vegetation at release sites. Survey information will be checked for quality control and entered into a Geographic Information System developed and maintained by the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC).

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